Competing Masculinities: Probing Political Disputes as Acts of Violence against Women from Southern Sudan and Darfur

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This article identifies the major forces militating against the promotion of women's rights in the Sudan. These factors are intimately linked to the country's multiple political disputes including Darfur and southern Sudan. The effects of political violence is elaborated through a detailed examination of women's political, economic and cultural rights. The article concludes by identifying the promotion of good governance and democratization as fundamental pre-requisites for advancing human rights and sustainable peace in the war-torn nation.

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 22)

Introduction

The Sudan, Africa's largest country in area, is a territory with incredible historical and political importance. The land and its location at the crossroads of Africa and the Middle East have influenced the course of its history and politics in a dramatic fashion. The country is the place of birth of numerous ethnolinguistic groups, all with distinctive outlooks on life, culture, faith traditions, cosmology, and experiential knowledge. This remarkable variety is in itself not a cause for clash and fragmentation. However, ethnic differences coupled with widespread competition over scarce resources and systematic marginalization had presented grounds for conflict and hostility rather than providing a basis for concord and tranquility as group differences became increasingly politicized under successive military regimes.

One observer astutely pointed out that the Sudan is a country at war with itself, and in so being, it infringes upon numerous conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which declares that, "In those states in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities should not be denied the right, in community with the other members

of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language."[1] Indeed the Sudan's past and present civil wars contradict every feature set forth in the Covenant, working against human rights in general and women's rights in particular, in devastating ways. First, these conflicts violate the rights of indigenous people of southern Sudan and Darfur in general by undermining the functioning of their communities to live in security critical to human welfare. Second, these wars led to substantial population displacement, forcing people to flee to locations where they become subjected to laws and regulations that ignore their rights to culture and self-determination and dismiss the legitimacy and soundness of their indigenous associations and modes of knowing. The Qanoon El-Nizzam El-Amm, or Public Order Law, in Khartoum, for instance, is a case in point. This law has been demoralizing to Sudanese displaced people by restricting their mobility and participation in some labor-force occupations viewed illicit by the Islamic State.

In his article, I comment on the effects of the multiple civil wars in the Sudan on women's rights from the regions of southern Sudan and Darfur. I will bring into play material gathered in various Sudanese shantytowns in order to illuminate the specificity of gender-based violence in Sudan's political disputes. I will then advance to provide particular examples on the breach of cultural, social, and economic rights in those locations. I end by highlighting the emergent sense of political subjectivity and agency among displaced women as the unintended consequences of these fierce disputes. It should be stated at the outset, however, that highlighting individual rights and self-determination, in this case, should not be understood as mere advocacy of a liberal tradition that has no roots in Sudanese society. Defenders of the liberal traditions of human rights would argue that, "While we are right to be concerned about the cultural health of minority communities, this gives us insufficient reason to abandon, modify, or reinterpret liberalism. Far from being indifferent to claims of minorities, liberalism puts concern for minorities at the forefront."[2] For the purposes of this commentary, pointing out to the pervasive contraventions of the rights of Sudanese indigenous people problematizes and interrogates the institutionalized state power over minorities, especially defenseless populations such as displaced women from southern Sudan and Darfur.

Case 1: Southern Sudan

Elsewhere I have argued that the Sudan is a perfect illustration of an African country unable to achieve nationhood despite a successful struggle for independence. As a result, the southern Sudanese people in general, and women in particular, have been enduring the wrath of the longest running civil strife in world's history. A report titled, "Follow the Women and the Cows," by the U.S. Committee on Refugees, stated that the death toll of southern Sudanese is larger than the combined fatalities suffered in recent wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Somalia and Algeria.[3] Since the civil war started, an estimated 1.9

million Southerners have died, 2.5 million are famine afflicted, and 350,000 crossed the borders to neighboring countries. This war continues to expose the South to widespread instability, forced capture and slavery, destruction of physical and natural environment, disturbance of cultural life and social cohesiveness, death, and displacement.

Approximately 4 million people have been forced to flee their homes in the Southern provinces of Equatoria, Bahr Elghazal, and Upper Nile. Joyce Yatta, a Christian Fujulu from Yei, explained what war displacement has meant to her:

> I arrived from Juba in 1993. I have very fond memories of pre-war days and before I was forced to move. I am very sad and stressed about the thoughts of what happened to my family back home and in Khartoum. I pray that peace will come back so that we can return to our land and enjoy life in the same way as we did before war displacement.

Yatta's story resonates with the stories of millions of others and speaks forcefully to how war has undermined the rights of Sudan's indigenous peoples to live peacefully in their home villages.

Largely cast in religious terms, the conflict has embodied the ideals of Arabization and Islamization of the Sudanese populations, irrespective of their indigenous affiliations. In this regard, the war exemplified an uncompromising effort on the country to manufacture one national identity against the wishes of ethnic and religious minorities. As Michael Ignatieff argues, nationalism in this respect can be seen as "the claim that while men and women have many identities, it is the notion that provides them with their primary form of belonging."[4] According to Ali Mazrui, Arabization and Islamization has been transforming North Africans' identities since the seventeenth century. Although the effort to create one national identity is by no means recent, it was introduced in the Sudanese political scene by former President Jaffar Mohamed Nemeriy and strictly enforced by Omer El-Bashir, another military commander, who came to power in 1989.

This forced assimilation process, deeply embedded in the forging of a monolithic Sudanese national identity, did not go unchallenged. "Faced with the assimilative excesses of the ruling classes in the North," writes Mansour Khalid, "the South has experimented with the entire spectrum of resistance, from a political crusade to be recognized as having their own authenticity and rights as citizens of the Sudan, to carrying arms."[5]

In diagnosing the root causes of war, some observers have suggested that British colonial polices planted the seeds of disunion in the Sudan, a country with extraordinary ethnic diversity, pitting North against South, Muslims against Christians, and Arabs against Africans. In the process, the policies enhanced the development and security of one group at the expense of another. But upon closer inspection, we find that colonial history, memories of the slave trade, unequal development, and other abuses of political, economic, and cultural rights undermined the trust upon which a peaceful environment could have been founded.

To concentrate on the culpability of history, though important, not only oversimplifies the agency of violators who infringe upon conventions and rules, but also absolves them from their responsibility in shaping policies that made Sudan's civil war the longest in world's history. Colonial history notwithstanding, since the country attained its independence from Britain in 1956, millions of southern Sudanese have been left dead or displaced as competing masculinities continue to undercut human security and welfare.

Let us take a look for example at the crimes against humanity that were committed by former President Jaffar Mohamed Nemeriy (1969-1984), whose own military record in southern Sudan in 1965, before his coming to power, not only earned him the derision of many Southerners, but attests to egregious forms of violence against innocent civilians as evidenced in the document released by Anya-nya Movement in 1971, and titled "What Nemeriy did":

> It should be noted that Major General Gaffer El Nemeriy was the Garrison Commander in Torit. He was responsible for Eastern Equatoria that is Torit and Kapoeta Districts. Before he went to Khartoum to take the Government by the usually military coup d'etat, the following villages were burnt according to his orders:
>
> Obira with a population of about 500
>
> Ilen with a population of 3000
>
> Galamini with a population of 300
>
> Oronyo with the population of about 3000
>
> Lohuto with a population of about 700
>
> Mura-Hatiha with a population of 500
>
> Tirrangore with a population of 1500
>
> Burung with a population of 200[6]

Nemeriy's adoption of Islamic Sharia laws in September 1983 contributed significantly to the reactivation of civil war which had not only imperiled individual and collective security that has been acknowledged in international conventions as a basic inalienable right, but also has infringed on cultural, economic, and political rights deemed fundamental more than five decades ago by the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unquestionably, the devastation of the villages enumerated above should supply strong justification for bringing perpetrators like Nemeriy before an international criminal tribunal. Alas, Nemeriy's crimes against humanity continue to go unpunished after receiving clemency from Khartoum's regime. As a young southern Sudanese student points out, "There is no accountability in the Sudan. If people like Nemeriy are punished, others will be afraid to commit murders and steal the wealth of the country. But it seems that no one cares."

Case 2: Darfur

To the readers of Samantha Power's compelling report "Dying in Darfur: Can Ethnic Cleansing in Sudan be Stopped?" which appeared in the *New Yorker*, history has repeated itself yet again in the most dreadful and rancorous manner.[7] Examining the Darfur crises through the lenses of a personal story of Amina Abaker Mohammed, Power illuminates the multiple ways in which the *Janjaweed* "evil horsemen" have perpetrated acts of ethnic violence and genocide against a defenseless, immobilized population.

Notwithstanding, stories like those of Amina Abaker Mohammed were common among a group of a recently displaced Darfurian women in Khartoum who reiterated trials and travails markedly similar to those noted in Power's essay among many important reports on the crises like those of Jennifer Leaning, Amnesty International, and other local and international NGOs. For example, in the words of Asha Ali whom I interviewed in Khartoum on August 14, 2004:

> Our situation is a real catastrophe. When the fighting started we all tried to run away with our children. The men fled after seeing others get killed and beaten by the Janjaweed. These people acted like devils. They don't have good hearts. They burnt villages, attacked and kidnapped women and caused a lot of pain and misery. We fled on foot in a very difficult. Now we are staying with people from home who came to Khartoum long time ago. Like us they don't have a lot, but they allowed us to stay with them in these small houses. We don't have money to buy food. We are also very worried about work. We cannot find work since this place is very far. Now the rainy season created added problems because this area is flooded. We depend only on Allah to change our situation. Our children are in danger too. Our situation is extremely terrible. We don't know what had happened to other relatives and neighbors. We hope that they are still alive. We are also worried that we will not be able to go back. We have no hope that we will get assistance. Not in this place anyway.

These stories, which are originating from the western region of Darfur, bear witness to the worst humanitarian crises in the world today.[8] The total death resulting from these crises is estimated at 50,000 in the entire region. In the words of Davaid Nabarro, head of crisis operations for the World Health Organization, "These figures are higher than those we had from East Timor, higher than the figures we had from Iraq in 1991, comparable to what we had in Rwanda in the bad times."[9] This conflict exploded in early 2003 when two main rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army and the Justice and Equality Movement, decided to strike military installations with the intention of sending a hard-hitting message of resentment and bitterness towards the region's unremitting sociopolitical and economic exclusion and marginality. The International Crisis Group has also reported that:

> (The rebels) also took arms to protect their communities against a twenty-year campaign by government-backed militias recruited among groups of Arab extraction in Darfur and Chad. These "Janjaweed" militias have over the past year received greatly increased government support to clear civilians from areas considered disloyal. Militias attacks

> and a scorched-earth government offensive have led to massive displacement, indiscriminate killings, looting and mass rape, all in contravention of Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions that prohibits attacks on civilians."[10]

Whilst peace negotiations are presently underway in Abuja, Nigeria, many Darfurian refugees and internally displaced people are particularly skeptical about the prospect of peace and repatriation. According to a compelling study by Suleiman Hamid, the Islamic movement, which was led by Hassan El-Turabi, perpetuated an ideology of creating an Arab-Muslim State in spite of the country's ethnoreligious differences. The government reinforced this project even after El-Turabi's marginalization by continuing its mission with incredible zeal. Darfur, in light of this analysis was seen as part and parcel of this pervasive project. Therefore, the characterization of the conflict as ethnic cleansing has a particularly strong resonance as far as the targeted groups (Zaghawa, Massaleet and Fur) are concerned.

Women's Rights to Physical Integrity

Perhaps the biggest concern that plagues women dealing with the civil war in the Sudan, as well as other ethnoreligious antagonisms around the world, is the grueling abuses they face as sexed bodies. Catherine MacKinnon sees the underlying principle behind this glaring lapse as follows:

> What is done to women is either too specific to women to be seen as human or too generic to human beings to be seen as specific to women. Atrocities committed against women are either too human to fit the notion of female or too female to fit the notion of human. "Human" and "female" are mutually exclusive by definition; you cannot be a woman and a human being at the same time.[11]

Although displacement is harrowing for everyone involved, it is far worse for women and girls who are the most likely victims of sexual violence and torture as the Darfur crisis makes abundantly clear. Displaced women are confronted with sexual violence experienced before, during, and after flight and arrival in new communities and are left to deal with significant physical and psychological effects of this victimization. Christina Dudu, a Southern displaced woman living in Khartoum, outlined the gendered forms of exploitation that accompanied the mass flight of women and girls but were absent at home in the South before the renewal of the civil war, including sexual abuse, prostitution, and harassment.[12] This wide constellation of sexual abuses contravenes the right to bodily integrity as a fundamental right, which includes sexual and reproductive rights. These rights signify the capability of women and men to exert control over matters concerning their sexuality and reproductive freedom. Alas, these entitlements have proved to be the most widely violated rights during wartime.

Consider the striking similarities in two reports released by Amnesty International on the topic of rape and other violence against women during the civil

war in Sudan and during the Darfur Crisis respectively. The first report on South Sudan covered the period of January to December 2000 and stated that:

> Violence against women by combatants on all sides, long a feature of the conflict in Sudan, intensified during the year. There were widespread reports of sexual abuse, including sexual slavery, rape and forced pregnancies. Rape was used as a tactic of war by both government and opposition forces to dehumanize and humiliate civilians in the conflict zone. However, because of the taboos and stigma attached to rape, reports were rare and impunity for the rapist was the rule.[13]

Contrast this report with a 2004 statement regarding sexual violence against women in Darfur. This statement is based on testimonies from refugee women in Chad in the camps of Goz Amer, Kounoungo, and Mile.

> The organization was able to collect the names of 250 women who have been raped in the context of the conflict in Darfur and to collect information concerning an estimated 250 further rapes. This information was collected from testimonies of individuals who represent only a fragment of those displaced by the conflict. Other human rights which have significantly targeted women and girls are: abductions, sexual slavery, torture and forced displacement.[14]

The violation of women's rights to bodily and sexual integrity is compounded by the victims' reluctance to report rape in fear of shame and community ostracism.

What makes rape an exceptionally alarming affront are the widely held beliefs toward sex and sexuality. Attitudes toward sexuality and reproduction are positioned at the heart of significant cultural and religious beliefs amongst the Sudanese. Open discussion of matters pertaining to sexuality is extremely proscribed by these beliefs. To a great extent, this interdiction is intimately linked to how society views sexuality in the first place. Largely seen as an ominous threat that looms largely over one's purity and morality if left unchecked, social and physical regulation is aggressively pursued.

Among large segments of Darfur populations, female circumcision is one of the most important vehicles for dulling women's sexuality. Violations of these taboos embody an insult on the community's codes of morality and honor, a factor that produce significant fears of speaking about and reporting rape crimes. A displaced woman echoed this fear when she explained the situation:

> Many women who have been attacked and raped are afraid to report the incidents. When we were talking about this issue, some people said *el-kalam da aib*, this talk is shameful. That is why many preferred to suffer in silence. We are a religious people and this crime has brought dishonor and humiliation. It could have been better to kill than to rape. Our only hope is that Allah will punish the criminals.

Closely linked to the abuses of women's bodily integrity, is the violations of their rights to health as they become exposed to STDs and HIV/AIDS, among other diseases. It is therefore imperative that the international community should urge State and Non-state actors to investigate the full extent of the infringements on women's right to physical integrity and health.

Cultural Rights

One of the most salient features of Arabization and Islamization is embodied in what came to be known as the Public Order Law, or El-Nizam El-Aam, for Khartoum State of 1996. This law, which is emblematic of the politicization of ethnoreligious identities, is also an authoritative commentary on the status of "minority cultures" of people living under Sharia. This law was passed by the government to curb practices that government officials labeled as "un-Islamic." Those who do not comply with its codes were brought to court. This law, which is extensive in scope, deals with a wide range of issues. It limits the length and duration of wedding parties. It affects women's employment and Islamic dress, or *hijab*. It mandates gender segregation on public transportation.[15] The law even prohibits people from bathing naked or half-naked in the Nile, a practice accepted by previous governments.

To ensure the enforcement of this law, the government expanded the Criminal Procedures Act of 1991 and vested the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeal, General Criminal Courts, and People's Criminal Courts with full authority to imprison, fine, whip, confiscate, and enforce any punishment they see fit on non-compliants. The law was hailed as the right arm of Arabization and Islamization. Indeed its infringement on the rights on religious and ethnic minorities did not seem to warrant its modification. According to a report put out by the Sudan Council of Churches Unit of Advocacy and Communication, "The Public Order Police are not bound by any geographical jurisdiction. Any of the units may make a campaign of searches kasha in any place even if it falls within a jurisdiction of another unit. This makes it very difficult to know the jurisdiction to which the arrested persons are taken." The report points out that the targets of the Public Order Police are primarily displaced persons, especially women held by authorities in Omdurman Women Prison for charges ranging from prostitution to alcohol-brewing, the latter made a crime under the law. The law also made the Islamic dress hijab mandatory, even among women irrespective of their religious affiliation.

As Susan Sered correctly argues, this imposition reflects the thinking of "[an] authoritarian institution with a large stake in women's bodies."[16] Emelide Kiden, a 45-year-old Kuku Christian from Bahr-El-Jebel, told me: "I came to Khartoum in 1995. Ever since I was not able to wear my traditional dress and I felt forced by law to cover my whole body. I am also afraid to brew." Other women echo the same sentiments. For many, alcohol brewing is not only about making a living, but also has many uses in numerous ceremonial practices ranging from birth, to marriage, and death.

Cultural rights as numerous conversations with displaced women have been amongst the most obvious casualties of war. The link between cultural rights and human rights was strengthened through the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, although the Covenant does not

attempt to define cultural rights per se. The Covenant's preamble recognizes that the "ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights." Boutros Boutros-Ghali argued, "By the right of an individual to culture, it is to be understood that every man (or woman) has the right to access to knowledge, to the arts and literatures of all peoples, to take part in scientific advancement and to enjoy its benefits, to make his (or her) contribution towards the enrichment of cultural life"[17]

As can be expected during war, human distress multiplies and takes on different forms of individual and collective trauma. Selfhood and personhood also undergo dramatic shifts. Since personhood is a highly differentiated experience, the systematic destruction of a community's physical safety and cultural life intersected to strike at its foundations in profound ways. The loss of community has meant that people are reconsidered afresh. Everyday experience, which emerges from dislocation, prompts a serious deliberation of the dialectal relationship between person and community and self and the world in roundabout ways. The sense of solidarity and the fear of losing it were explained in Francis Deng's analysis of attitudes toward moving away from home: "To a Dinka, his country, with all its deprivations and troubles, is the best in the world. Until very recently, going to foreign lands was not only a rarity, but also a shame. For a Dinka, to threaten his relatives of leaving Dinkaland, was seen as little short of suicide. What a lot to give up, and for what?"[18] In the context of war, violence, and forced migration, assimilation into the Arabo-Islamic practices of host communities in the North means annihilation of an "unambiguously" African world, though itself far from monolithic.

The effect of war on self-perception and sense of security is distilled in Eisenbrush's notion of "cultural bereavement." This bereavement is attributed to the loss of shelter as well as vanishing security. Eisenbruch's notion of bereavement receives ample validation from the testimony of Theodora Poni, a Kuku Christian from Equatoria, who has lived in Khartoum since 1984. "Sometimes I say to myself, it is better to die rather than live in the conditions I am living in right now," she says. "I desperately want to reunite with my family members from whom I have been separated twenty years ago. I cannot stop thinking about them. I hope to be able to go back to the South so that these feelings could get resolved."

Forced migration, as shown in Poni's story and many others, affects collective and self-perception, representations of self and others, national and ethnic culture, as well as material and economic security. Consider for the example the migration biography of Cecilia Joseph Wani (Morawska 2000):

> Wani, a 39-year-old Christian Nilo-Hamite, moved to Khartoum from Kajokeji in 1979. A widow with five children and one dependent, and whose husband died in Khartoum, Wani now works as a cleaner in St. Phillip Health Center. Wani's husband came to Khartoum to look for work, and before the war, she describes life as "very good," her life style as normal, and the youth as decent. When the war started, life changed in Khartoum. Wani describes an

> influx of relatives, the changing lifestyle of youth, market changes, and her inability to afford rent for a house, which resulted in her move to a displaced location. During this move, her husband died, and she had to sell all her assets to maintain her children. She resides in an area where other relatives live, as they joined her after departure. Aspects of cultural life that she has been able to maintain include her food, and her language, Bari, but she notes that her children refuse to learn it. As a result, she cannot teach, or tell, her children the folktales that she considers to be valuable. She is not able to maintain her folkdances, traditional dress, and folktales. These folk dances are hard to maintain because they are not allowed, and she is prevented from maintaining her traditional dress due to laws requiring the Islamic lawful dress, or tobe. She has no interaction with Northerners, but knows that their cultural practices include "henna," circumcision, the prohibition of young girls from attending the market, dressing "tobe," etc. She is not prepared to embrace any of these practices except for dress, which is required, and is repulsed by female circumcision, which she describes as "dangerous" and wrong. Since her husband has died, she is responsible for the decisions in her household. Life for her, she says, is difficult, and will be more difficult as long as there is a war, both economically and socially. Besides that, her most pressing concern is that her children will forget her culture.

Wani's biography effectively illuminates the ways in which bereavement becomes associated with vulnerability, an emotion that is also powerfully depicted in the story of Nora Mule below:

> Mule is 60 years old and has been separated from her husband since she departed Kopoeta in 1989 with her son. She works as a housekeeper, but relies on her grown children for support. She described life before the war as much better, but feels better being in Khartoum, away from the sounds of guns in Kapoeta. She lives far from other friends of relatives, but has been able to maintain her culture through food and occasional folk dances. She has given up alcoholic drinks, however, due to her commitment to Christianity. Since she was separated from her husband, she has maintained decision-making authority in her household, which she feels has given her a better life. She was, as she puts it, "at peace with [her husband]." Although she feels that her life has no pressing conditions, she misses her children who are working in the army, and makes do with the photos she has of them. When asked for an acceptable solution to the problems facing herself and others, she reflected that, although peace would bring some joy, death might be the only solution.

Stories like those of Nora Mule prompt the question, how are loss and bereavement to be understood in the southern Sudanese milieu? In the words of Margaret Mondong, who arrived in Khartoum in 1996:

> I am concerned that continued residence in Khartoum would lead my people to abandon or lose contact with their culture. Although we try to teach our children our culture, we often find it impossible to compete with Arab and Islamic culture taught to them in school. I feel that my problems are the problems of all displaced people; we are drinking in the same pot. The only acceptable solution to these complicated issues is peace.

Displaced women's experiences show that as family forms and kinship systems disintegrate as a result of war, and violence, identity, and belonging take on complex meanings, new memories are made. One existential condition that prompts the negotiation of self and community is residential patterns. Finding shelter, wherever that may be, is more immediate for displaced people than the need to live

among relatives. Also important to note is that the kinship "vacuum" that results from displacement does not go unfilled. Neighbors in the host communities step up to fill the role as fictive kin, both ready and willing to enter into a new chain of exchanges and conversations. In spite of the importance of these new relationships, cultural loss remains a powerful force that contributes to the reshaping of ideas and values.

Loss of cultural rights in both their ideational and phenomenal dimensions are therefore of special importance to non-Muslims Southerners. If we are to assess the meaning of cultural rights in southern Sudanese cosmology, we will be confronted with an impressive overabundance of cultural expressions and rules that govern every aspect of one's existence from the cradle to the grave. The fact that the very foundation of village societies has been blasted to bits has meant that whatever notions and significances people attached to their practices are being shattered. These include among many "traditional structures": age classes, clan classifications, childbirth rituals, kinship rules, betrothal and marriage, laws regulating inheritance and property ownership, rules of compensation of injury, distribution of resources, totems, magic, oath-taking, rainmaking and sacrifice, Supreme Beings and Guardian Spirits, initiation, burial and stories told around the evening fire.

Philister Baya, a southern Sudanese woman living in Khartoum explained the extent to which displacement in Khartoum destabilized their cultural life:

> When we organize for social occasions such as marriages, funerals and rites which is to continue late at night, we should get permission from the local authorities, namely El-Nizam El-Aam to conduct such occasions. In most cases El-Nizam El-Aam go into houses and interrupt the occasions without good reasons. Christians are ordered to close their shops on Fridays during Jumma prayers by the same governmental body. On refusal, the Southern displaced women are struggling to maintain their living, are dragged to the Public Order Court to be fined.[19]

In Sudanese shantytowns and camps for the internally-displaced people repeat analogous concerns, showing the enormous pressure of the Public Order law on their economic rights to which I turn next.

Economic Rights

Contraventions of cultural rights, notwithstanding the consequences of the Public Order Law outlined above have been immeasurable in the economic realm as they restricted women's involvement in certain occupations. According to Susie Pito, a Mikaya Christian who arrived at Khartoum in 1996, said: "I am no longer able to make alcoholic drinks because of Sharia law. I am troubled by being viewed as an infidel under Sharia." Since little work is available for women who struggle against urban poverty, in desperation they turn to sex work and alcohol brewing. Yahya el-Hassan, a PANA correspondent, described the forbidding reality:

> Once in the north, (women) are forced to live in cramped camps around the big cities that lack all conditions of a decent living. This situation forces women to compete for the very limited opportunity available, such as washers and maids. The rest opt for the brewing of local gin (araqi), or prostitution, two lucrative but dangerous businesses if the women are caught by the police. If convicted, the women are moved to an all-female prison. A recent UN research has found that over 80 percent of the inmates of Omdurman women prison in Khartoum were women from the South convicted of trafficking in araqi or prostitution.

Obviously, the Public Order Law has deleterious effects on southern Sudanese displaced women's economic rights by abrogating their right to work and earn a living in a secure environment. This problem was addressed by Christina Dudu:

> The other major problem facing Southern displaced women is unequal job opportunities. If one makes a survey, one will find that there are many Southern women and men who are highly educated graduates but are jobless. Southern women in government and non-government institutions are accommodated within the domestic labor force. They are sweepers, cleaners or messengers. Southern women have to accept as they had no other options for survival.[20]

As for women from Darfur who do not necessarily engage in beer brewing for religious considerations, displacement violated their economic rights by undercutting their access to adequate standards of living which "encompasses several more rights, including the right to food, the right to health, the right to water, the right to necessary social services, the right to clothing, and the right to housing."[21] Khadijia Yagoub who arrived at Khartoum in May 2004 explains:

> We used to farm back home in our village. We did not extended our hands or begged for food or anything else. The poverty and want we saw in Khartoum is causing us a lot of worries and stress. We have to think about the little children because at least the adults are strong enough to bear hunger. Our life in the village was merciful. Here in Khartoum there is no assistance. We are here in this far away place where we cannot move to find work especially the majority of women who have little children. There is no food and our hosts are struggling and are themselves in trouble. This fighting destroyed our live there and caused us humiliation and hunger here. I don't know what the future holds. Now, I have no hope.

Political Futures

In this article, I tried to demonstrate the ways in which Sudan's multiple conflicts have led to serious violations of economic, social, and cultural rights. These infringements have certainly far more damaging effects on women and girls since they are denied the opportunity to live in an environment in which they could take par in decisions vital to their safety and well-being. The perpetuation of gender-

based violence before, during, and after the conflicts has positively sharpened women's consciousness about themselves as first and foremost political subjects. Furthermore, it refined their views on their political futures as they ponder new roles in peacemaking and the reconstitution of communities. In contemplating the role of women in southern Sudan and Darfur as the major stakeholders in peaceful settlements in their respective communities, we have to take into consideration their experiences as displaced women. Without romanticizing forced migration, we can concede that it created avenues for women to express agency and create avenues for self-empowerment in ways previously unknown.

Nowhere has this been so powerfully demonstrated than in Mary Hillary Wani's compelling paper "Women's Agenda for Peace" that she delivered at the Sudanese Women's Peace Forum held in October 29th 2001. Relying on indigenous conceptualization of peace, Wani writes:

> For the purposes of drawing a women's agenda for peace I have opted to consider the definition as projected by the majority of the displaced women. In simple terms they defined peace to mean having security; peace means the right to move without restrictions; peace means love, unity and solidarity; peace is justice, freedom and absence of all forms of discrimination; peace means having a house, a job and land to cultivate, having enough food and being free from diseases; peace means the right to education for our children; peace means freedom of worship; peace means the right to our historical heritage, peace means participation in decisions and plans that affect our lives.[22]

As much as gender-based violence, war, displacement have combined to create a legion of challenges and struggles, they generate new spaces within which women can participate on equal footing with men in decisions vital to their lives. The renegotiation of these roles was made clear in two accounts from a Southerner and a Darfurian respectively.

In the words of Olga Odera, a Christian Acholi who moved to Khartoum from Torit in 1993:

> Men are used to making decisions in my community of origin. Women accepted that as a natural thing. Since I came here alone, I feel free to make my own decisions. Long time ago, I used to ask my husband to tell me what to do about many things. Now I am in control of my life and I support myself. This situation gave me the chance to have a say on many issues. I no longer think that women should follow men obediently. They can use their experience in Khartoum to influence decisions outside the home as well."

Views like those of Olga Odera abound as becomes obvious from the narrative of Sakina Adam from Darfur.

> When the fighting started in my village, all the women started to run all over. We fled to Kas before coming to Khartoum. The journey with the children took us very long days. It was the most difficult journey. We started to talk about why the men were preying on us. What did we do to them? We understood that after they burnt villages, looted animals from many people including Haboba (a woman who was sitting next to Sakina during the interview), that men were using us to hurt the men in our family and village. They wanted to cause a lot

of pain by attacking the women. The whole village fled fearing for their lives. Some beautiful women were abducted and others were beaten and humiliated. Now we understand that we are here because the men wanted to degrade the community. For this reason we cannot not go back until we are assured that we will not be hurt again. We need security and we need everyone outside to know that without providing safety we cannot take this big risk. We will remain in Khartoum and see about peace. Peace will help but the damage has been done. We need women to be able to protect themselves because some back home did their best to protect their families.

This view corroborates Amartya Sen's most commanding observations on women's agency:

> The active agency of women cannot, in any serious way, ignore the urgency of rectifying many inequities that blight the well being of women and subject them to unequal treatment. Thus the agency role must be much concerned with women's well being also. Similarly, coming from the other end, any practical attempt at enhancing the well-being of women cannot but draw on the agency of women themselves in bringing about such change."[23]

Drawing on the experiences of Sudanese women from the South and Darfur will help formulate strategies for gender equity in post-conflict Sudan. This approach will depend fundamentally, however, on the State and State-actors' capability to uphold peace and fortify security measures so that war-displaced women can help rebuild their shattered lives. In light of this political context, women as the main stakeholders in the reconstitution of their communities have undoubtedly earned their right to equitable participation. In the meantime, for those women who still live in shantytowns and camps, fulfillment of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as has been brilliantly articulated by Sergi Vieira de Mello is fundamental. According to de Mello "Internally displace persons shall enjoy in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. They shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced."[24]

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Notes

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